

SENATE RECORD VOTE ANALYSIS

105th Congress
2nd Session

Vote No. 175

June 25, 1998, 11:29 a.m.
Page S-7047 Temp. Record

DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION/Cut Defense & Increase Veterans Affairs

SUBJECT: National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1999 . . . S. 2057. Harkin amendment No. 2982.

ACTION: AMENDMENT REJECTED, 38-55

SYNOPSIS: As reported, S. 2057, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 1999, will authorize \$270.6 billion in budget authority for national defense programs (this amount is equal to the requested level, and is in accordance with the budget agreement of last year). In real terms, spending will be \$2.9 billion less than last year. As a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), defense spending will be just 3.1 percent, which will be the lowest level of defense spending since 1940. Defense spending has declined steadily since 1986, when it was 6.5 percent of GDP.

The Harkin amendment would authorize the Secretary of Defense to transfer \$329 million to the medical account of the Veterans Affairs (VA) Department.

Those favoring the amendment contended:

The United States has a huge defense budget that is full of wasteful spending. We should cut some of that wasteful spending to take care of sick and elderly veterans. The Harkin amendment would allow the Secretary of Defense to transfer \$329 million of defense funds to the VA medical account. It would not require that transfer because that would make the amendment subject to a point of order. However, we are certain that the practical effect would be the same, because we are confident that, given the chance, the Clinton Administration would happily reduce defense spending to benefit veterans. Two years ago, the comptroller general of the Defense Department said that the Department could not account for over \$13 billion in spending. That inability indicates that there is so much excess money sloshing around in the Department that a cut of \$329 million would not even be noticed. Veterans are living longer than before, and health care costs are escalating. We therefore need to increase veterans funding to take care of the commensurately larger health care bills that veterans now have. We urge our colleagues to support this amendment.

(See other side)

YEAS (38)			NAYS (55)			NOT VOTING (7)	
Republicans (5 or 10%)	Democrats (33 or 80%)		Republicans (47 or 90%)	Democrats (8 or 20%)		Republicans (3)	Democrats (4)
Campbell	Biden	Inouye	Abraham	Hutchison	Cleland	Hutchinson- ⁴	Akaka- ²
D'Amato	Bingaman	Johnson	Allard	Inhofe	Graham	Roth- ²	Baucus- ²
Faircloth	Boxer	Kennedy	Ashcroft	Kempthorne	Kerrey	Specter- ³	Glenn- ²
Grassley	Breaux	Kerry	Bennett	Kyl	Levin		Rockefeller- ²
Jeffords	Bryan	Kohl	Bond	Lott	Lieberman		
	Bumpers	Landrieu	Brownback	Lugar	Reed		
	Byrd	Lautenberg	Burns	Mack	Robb		
	Conrad	Leahy	Chafee	McCain	Torricelli		
	Daschle	Mikulski	Coats	McConnell			
	Dodd	Moseley-Braun	Cochran	Murkowski			
	Dorgan	Moynihan	Collins	Nickles			
	Durbin	Murray	Coverdell	Roberts			
	Feingold	Reid	Craig	Santorum			
	Feinstein	Sarbanes	DeWine	Sessions			
	Ford	Wellstone	Domenici	Shelby			
	Harkin	Wyden	Enzi	Smith, Bob			
	Hollings		Frist	Smith, Gordon			
			Gorton	Snowe			
			Gramm	Stevens			
			Grams	Thomas			
			Gregg	Thompson			
			Hagel	Thurmond			
			Hatch	Warner			
			Helms				

EXPLANATION OF ABSENCE:

- 1—Official Business
- 2—Necessarily Absent
- 3—Illness
- 4—Other

SYMBOLS:

- AY—Announced Yea
- AN—Announced Nay
- PY—Paired Yea
- PN—Paired Nay

Those opposing the amendment contended:

The Harkin amendment would rob soldiers currently serving our country to increase spending on health care for veterans who have already served our country. We have no objection to the latter part of this amendment, but we wish our liberal colleagues would quit their constant assault on the national security of our Nation. Frankly, we think that most of the supporters of the Harkin amendment would vote for it if all it did was slash spending for defense. We do not know when they have ever voted against any proposal to cut defense spending for any purpose. By requiring the money to go to the Veterans Affairs Department, they know they will pick up a handful of votes, but we are confident that a strong majority of Senators will see this amendment for what it is--yet another raid on an already woefully inadequate defense budget. Thousands of soldiers are paid so poorly they are on food stamps; deployments are so lengthy and constant that people are quitting the military in droves (for instance, the reenlistment rate for pilots is now below 20 percent, which is a record low); maintenance budgets are so low that fighter jets and other equipment have to be cannibalized for parts in order to keep other equipment running; training budgets have been slashed; procurement budgets have been slashed; military housing is so dilapidated that the Federal Government would be prosecuted for being a slum lord if the housing were offered for civilian use. There simply are no bright spots. Making matters even worse, the current President, who is responsible for the defense budget cuts, who zealously avoided military service in his youth, and who wrote that he "abhorred" the military, has been very fond of sending U.S. personnel on various military adventures around the world. The most expensive has been Bosnia, which he insisted would cost no more than \$1.2 billion but which has so far cost nearly \$10 billion in direct costs. Most of the costs of these military deployments have been paid for by raiding other defense accounts, thereby further degrading military capabilities.

It is true that the Defense Department needs to improve its accounting procedures, and it is true that it often does not spend money in the most efficient and effective manner. These facts do not mean that we can cut funding without causing further damage to military capabilities. As a percentage of GDP, the military is only half the size it was 10 years ago. Ten years ago, it also needed to improve its accounting procedures, and it also did not always spend money as efficiently and effectively as it could. Cutting spending is not the way to achieve reforms. To an extent, some reforms are not desirable. We want our military to have the best technology and training possible. It would be more efficient and effective to pay less for proven technologies and to train our soldiers to just average levels of competence, but the result would be more battlefield deaths and less security. We are not looking for simple market efficiencies when what is being purchased is the security of our country--we will pay a premium for the best defense. When we push the envelope to improve, we will have some failures, and some cost overruns, but the alternative is unacceptable.

It would be refreshing if our liberal colleagues, for once, looked someplace other than the Defense Department for money anytime they found something that they wanted on which spend more money. We have a \$1.7-trillion budget, of which only \$271 billion is for defense. We would be pleased to vote in favor of higher veterans health care spending, but not at the expense of further weakening national defense. We object to the Harkin amendment's proposed funding source, and thus strongly urge our colleagues to join us in rejecting this amendment.